

The Old Folks' Matrimonial Exchange.

(Original.)

An elderly lady with a pair of short gray curls on each temple stepped into the private office of Philander Shanks, merchant. Mr. Shanks rose, bowed, pointed to a seat and asked her what he could do for her.

"I have come to see you, Mr. Shanks, on a very peculiar mission. I have a plan which I must preface by a bit of explanation."

The lady paused and looked as if she was hunting for some place to begin, then went on:

"There are two parts to life for those who live to be our age. The first half is entirely unlike the second. In youth we know nothing of the loneliness of old age. Many a man and woman up to forty is absorbed in that which has nothing to do with providing companionship for old age. Then perhaps suddenly a realization comes to us of the fact that we need the home. We remember the lost opportunities of youth to form a connection which would have resulted in sons and daughters growing up about us and—"

"Madam," interrupted Mr. Shanks, "you are describing me. I have built up a fortune, but have neglected to build up a home. I have reached the time when I would gladly give the fortune for the home. What is there for me when I leave this office? A miserable existence till the next morning, when I resume my duties. I dine, alone, spend a lonely evening at my club, and when I go to my desolate apartments—"

"And I," interrupted the lady—"I live in a room by myself. I manage to get along during the day, since I am interested in several charitable associations—president of one and secretary of another—but when evening comes how can I go out alone and where can I go?"

"Does your plan aim to relieve such conditions, madam?"

"It does. You have made it very easy for me to propose it. I knew you were a bachelor and past—well, past fifty."

"Fifty-five, madam."

Therefore I knew you would sympathize with me. I propose to establish an exchange for those elderly people who would like to marry, but have no one to marry. True, the major part of the deficiency can never make up the children. Dear little things, how I would love to have them always about me, with their funny ways, their—"

"And grown, madam. I would give my check for a million for a son to succeed me in this business."

"And if I had had children when I was from twenty to thirty I should now be petting my grandchildren. I love them best from eighteen months to four years, from the time they are learning to walk and to talk till they begin to crave playmates."

"And think what a fine thing it is to watch them while they are being educated—the boys growing strong and manly, the girls good and beautiful."

"But we are wasting time without coming to the point. I will enter my name as the first woman charter member of the exchange. I would like you to enter yours as the first man member."

"Gladly, madam," regretfully. "We cannot, as you say, surround ourselves with families. We are too old. But we may make homes for each other. No man can make a home without a woman."

"You will need some funds, madam, first for stationery for your notices and invitations, then to secure a place for meeting. I trust you will permit me to furnish a little fund for a starter." He took a check book from a drawer. "What name, madam?"

"Spinney—D. A. Spinney."

"What a coincidence!" remarked Mr. Shanks, pausing in his work, laying

down his pen and looking at the may through his spectacles. "Do you know, madam, had it not been for one of those astute conditions incident to youth I might have had a home with a lovely girl by the name of Spinney."

"We all have those memories. I one day parted in a pet with a man."

"An ass probably you mean."

"He took me to a ball. I noticed the name of a girl on his card of dance engagements who I thought was trying to get him away from me. I told him that he must either strike off that name or strike off mine for the five dances I had agreed to give him."

"Strange!" mused Mr. Shanks. "Do you know that that very same thing happened to me? A girl made the same requirement, and I drew my pencil through her own name wherever it appeared on my card. I was a fool. The fact that she wouldn't brook a rival was proof positive that she loved me."

"Nevertheless she had no right to make such a demand unless she was engaged to you."

"But for that I have always believed she would have been my wife."

He handed her the check. She looked at the signature, and her eyes seemed riveted to it. Without raising them she said:

"I didn't know your first name was Phil—I mean Philander."

"It is. But why do you notice that?"

"Because"—she leaned back in her chair and covered her face with her hands—"because mine is Domida."

The clichey click of a typewriting machine in the next room was all that was heard for some moments, and when Mr. Shanks spoke it served to drown his words.

The proposed exchange was nipped in the bud by the marriage of the first man and woman charter members.

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